

Learning Skills Academy  
Final Monitoring Report  
For  
The New Hampshire  
Special Education  
Monitoring and Improvement Process  
1997/1998 Academic Year



*Igniting Every Potential*



**Learning Skills Academy**  
**1247 Washington Rd., PO Box 955**  
**Rye, NH 03870**

**History & Philosophy**

In the winter of 1985, a young man from the seacoast was, for the first time in his life, making real progress with his education. His father, a local business man, and his teacher began dreaming about building a school in this area that could reach this student and others like him. From those dreams, a plan grew and from that plan Learning Skills Academy opened its doors in September. Over the years, we have been through many changes, but throughout that time, our vision has remained remarkably consistent.

Our vision is to Ignite Every Potential in our students, their parents, our faculty and staff and, in many ways, the community that we serve. We plan to accomplish this by:

- ◆ Working with students in grades 4 through 10 whose primary issue is a language learning disability.
- ◆ Providing a safe, nurturing environment where students can recognize themselves as learners and reestablish their self-esteem.
- ◆ Teaching students to accept and understand their learning difficulty.
- ◆ Helping students develop tools and strategies to enable them to read, solve complex problems, and become lifelong learners.
- ◆ Teaching parents to understand and support their children's learning needs.
- ◆ Fostering learning and continued growth in our faculty and staff based on new ideas from within LSA, from other successful educational organizations, and from the latest research.
- ◆ Encouraging school districts to work with us to address the needs of these students.
- ◆ Becoming a vital community resource by:
  - ◆ Making the resources of the school available after school hours.
  - ◆ Offering open enrollment in specialized training.
  - ◆ Developing well-trained and highly successful teachers for the educational community.
  - ◆ Returning students who become who become productive citizens in their communities.

# Focus Question and Data Sources

A) Focus Question:

**How can we improve relationships with the NH Department of Education, school districts, parents, students and the community at large?**

B) Data Sources:

- ◆ Surveys and interviews of each target constituency (i.e., school districts, parents, etc.)
- ◆ Surveys and interviews of third person interested parties, such as mental health providers and civic organizations.
- ◆ Internal files (Specifically for the Compliance Review).
- ◆ New tracking tools (to be developed) such as noted "angry phone calls" or tracking referral sources (district referrals).
- ◆ Case Studies tracking student's admission and progress.

## I. Administrative Record

### I. Teams:

#### I. IDEA Team:

Name	Area(s) Involved In	Relationship to LSA
Marcus Mann	Facilitator, Survey Team, Compliance Team	Executive Director
Freda Weinbrecht	Survey Team, Case Study Team	Program Director
Carol Williams	Case Study Team	Parent
Christina Nancarrow	Case Study Team	Special Educator
Christine Cross	Compliance Team	Administrative Asst.
Linda Lippmeier		Speech & Language Path.
Mary Ann Roberts		LD Specialist
Shannon Tosatti	Case Study Team, Survey Team	Special Educator
Steve Scarfo	Survey Team	Psychological Counselor

#### II. External Technical Service Providers:

Name	Area of Involvement	Employer
Mary Dolan-Meyers	File Review	Ossipee Central School, SAU 49
Lauren Globe	File Review	Hampton Falls, SAU 21
Jana McCabe	File Review	Strafford Learning Center
Kevin Murphy	Staff Interviews	Somersworth, SAU 56
Jeff Pettee	File Review	The Hunter School
Susan Wright	Staff Interviews	SAU 49

#### III. Schedule of IDEA Team meetings:

<u>DATES</u>	<u>AGENDA/KEY ISSUES</u>
9/18/97	Identify team members
10/10/97	Select monitoring options
10/13/97	Determine focus question
10/14/97	Develop timeline
10/17/97	Develop subteams Case study issues Data sources

<u>DATES</u>	<u>AGENDA/KEY ISSUES</u>
10/31/97	Issues relating to Case study, Survey, and Compliance sub-teams.
11/7/97	Define our purpose.
11/14/97	Discuss surveys, Discuss on-site which one of the members attended, Improving relationships with districts and others.
12/5/97	Discuss sub-team issues improving relationships Measuring the results (criteria) Outside resources.
12/19/97	Create deadlines Review timeline
1/23/98	Review sub-team issues.
2/13/98	Updated for Case Study and Compliance Teams. Discuss compliance review/on-site.
3/13/98	Preparation for on-site compliance review. Status update on case studies and surveys.
3/25/98	On-site compliance review.
5/1/98	Reviewed completeness of case studies and surveys. Noted format for compliance review. Reviewed missing information from Application.
5/22/98	Analyze trends from case studies and surveys.
6/22/98	Sub-team leaders meet with Freda to develop Improvement Plan.

# **SURVEYS**

## **Procedure**

There were four surveys that were administered to the appropriate target populations which included:

- ◆ Past Student
- ◆ Present Student
- ◆ Present Parent
- ◆ Present District

All of these surveys were designed to discover how well we interact with our constituents and how well we are communicating with them.

## **Strengths**

- ◆ From the Past Student survey we discovered that we had been very successful at making the students feel 'normalized'.
- ◆ From the Present Student survey we found that our students feel we as a staff have a good understanding of them and their disabilities and they too feel comfortable in our school.
- ◆ Our Present Parent survey showed that we have been successful at improving some of our communication procedures, i.e. new news letters and the monthly calendars.
- ◆ The Present District survey let us know that we have made some of the appropriate modifications to our communication efforts with them. i.e. flexibility of billing schedules and meeting notifications.

Overall we discovered that we have been improving our communications with each group but that we still had some areas to focus on.

## **Areas For Improvement**

While analyzing the data we collected we discovered that there were some areas that our constituents were not completely satisfied with. We will discuss any areas of concern with them. Some of the dissatisfaction comes from misunderstanding our procedures. In these situations we will create more effective ways of communicating what it is we're doing and why. Other issues arise from inadequate policies and procedures. Here, the issue will be addressed by changing the affected areas.

- ◆ From our Past Student survey we found that Students weren't comfortable with the transition out of our environment into that of a more main-streamed school. Also we discovered that students often left feeling no greater understanding of their own disability.

- ◆ The Present Student survey showed that we could benefit from more effective communications with our students. They felt that they were going unheard because we did not affect certain changes they would have liked, i.e. dress code issues, etc... They also made mention of classes they may not have liked, didn't want to have, and didn't quite understand why they have to have them.
- ◆ Regarding the Present Parent survey, we noticed they desired to be more involved with the school but for various reasons the opportunities already provided were not conducive to the parents schedules. They also wished there to be more flexibility in scheduling events and meetings.
- ◆ Districts were concerned with our making paperwork easier to read and less cumbersome. They felt we needed to address the issue of transitions and how we process students into new settings. They are also concerned with the overall cost of attendance.

## **CASE STUDIES**

**Focus Question:** How can we improve our relationships with parents, districts, the community at large and the State Department of Education

### **Case Study:**

Case studies were completed on three students who attended the Learning Skills Academy during the academic year of 1997-1998. We selected the students based on their length of time at Learning Skills, and the specific programs they had been a part of. We wanted to look at a student who attended our school for four or more years, a student who had transitioned into our high school program, and a student who was relatively new to our school. After looking at seven different sources of information for each student, we noticed many trends. We were able to see the areas we need to improve and areas that are our strengths.

#### **1. Source of Information: Testing**

##### **Trends:**

- ◆ All of our students have scattered scores on any and all of the testing, indicating a learning disability.

##### **How we are relating this information to our focus question:**

- ◆ As we look at the information the testing gives us, we are better able to understand the students we can educate most effectively.
- ◆ Communicating this information to both districts and parents will help improve relations.

#### **2. Source of Information: Background Student Information**

##### **Trends:**

- ◆ We discovered through background investigation, that the parents of each of our students were dissatisfied with the services being provided to their child in their hometown school district.
- ◆ Each parent had made the initial referral for his or her own child. They had discovered that there was something wrong before anyone else.

##### **How we are relating this information to our focus question:**

- ◆ It is imperative to communicate to both parents and districts the importance of early intervention for students with learning disabilities.
- ◆ The earlier we are able to work with our students, the sooner they will have greater chances at being successful in their hometown districts.
- ◆ We find it necessary to better communicate our role in our student's education.
- ◆ We would like to expand our current in house teaming philosophy to include more effective team-like relationships with our parents and sending districts.



- ◆ **Everyone involved in our students' education should be working toward the same common goals.**

### 3. Source of Information: **Initial Classroom Observation**

Trends:

- ◆ **As we reviewed our case study students, we noticed they all had immature social skills and an inability to properly interpret social interactions.**
- ◆ **Often times they appear aloof and oblivious to social cues.**

How we are relating this information to our focus question:

- ◆ **Students with learning disabilities are often self-isolating.**
- ◆ **In many public school settings, these types of students feel even more isolated as they are placed in resource rooms or special programs.**
- ◆ **Often times, even special education teachers are isolated.**
- ◆ **Our school allows both the teachers and students to be integrated into all aspects of our school.**
- ◆ **Students can be a part of more social situations and teachers are better able to address any pragmatic issues as they come up.**
- ◆ **It is important that we communicate to parents and districts the problems students with learning disabilities have with pragmatic skills.**
- ◆ **Our school addresses these social issues daily.**

### 4. Source of Information: **Student Progress**

Trends:

- ◆ **Our students progress slowly, at their own pace.**
- ◆ **At times there are periods of rapid growth.**
- ◆ **It is very noticeable that pragmatic and social skills are delayed.**

How we are relating this information to our focus question:

- ◆ **As we reviewed the trends in our students' progress, we noted a need to communicate with parents more often and in different ways.**
- ◆ **We would like to make our progress reports more accurate, including both positive and negative comments, painting a true picture of the child's progress.**
- ◆ **Also, we would like to include pragmatic goals in the progress reports and I.E.P goals.**

### 5. Source of Information: **Parent Participation**

Trends:

- ◆ **We have noted that parents who live close to our school or are new to our school are much more likely to participate in school events.**
- ◆ **Also, involving parents in teams has increased specific parent involvement.**

How we are relating this information to our focus question:

- ◆ **Create a new parent buddy system.**
- ◆ **Target specific issues each month at parent information night.**
- ◆ **The Week in Review- a weekly correspondence with parents from students and teachers.**

#### **6. Source of Information: Our observations of the parents**

Trends:

- ◆ **They want us to “fix” their child.**
- ◆ **They have a distrustful relationship with their hometown districts.**
- ◆ **They are caring and concerned about their child.**
- ◆ **They have been their own child’s advocates.**

How we are relating this information to our focus question:

- ◆ **We feel a need to better understand the parents’ relationship with their child.**
- ◆ **We have researched a program called M.A.P.S. This process would enable both our school and the sending district to understand the emotional ups and downs the parents experienced regarding their child.**

#### **7. Source of Information: Academic Tools**

Trends:

- ◆ **We have noted that neither parents or districts are utilizing one of the present academic tools, the portfolio.**
- ◆ **There does not seem to be enough time to review the portfolios at scheduled conferences and there is no other specified time to view them.**

How we are relating this information to our focus question:

- ◆ **Students could present their portfolios to the parents and districts.**
- ◆ **We could add photographs and video to the portfolios to include events over the school year.**

## Compliance Monitoring

- A) **Private Facility Application and Assurances** – The completed Private Facility Application and Assurances has been submitted and reviewed for compliance with the New Hampshire Standards for the Education of Students with Disabilities for Private Facilities. Necessary additions, updates and changes are being submitted concurrent with this Final Monitoring Report.
- B) **Onsite Visit** – On March 25, 1998, a team of external technical service providers interviewed LSA staff members and conducted a review of the documentation and programming for four students. The results of the staff interviews were considered in the development of our Improvement Plan. The student files and program were reviewed for compliance with the New Hampshire Standards for the Education of Students with Disabilities for Private Facilities. Those findings are summarized below.
- 1) **Commendations** – The external technical service providers were found the following strengths in Learning Skill's program.
- a) The format (written in letter form to the students) and content of the progress reports were well designed and effective.
  - b) Good cooperation and coordination within the school, enhanced by good internal communication and teams communicating about and deal with specific issues (student issues team and weekly staff meetings were noted).
  - c) High level of ongoing staff training.
  - d) Energetic staff who enjoy working here.
  - e) Good teaching style and programming – phonology noted specifically.
  - f) Very nice student/teacher ratios.
  - g) Parents and students were pleased with the school. Students worked well within the program.
- 2) **Citations** – The team noted several areas of non-compliance (see appendix A) which we address in the following Corrective Action Plan.

## Corrective Action Plan

Findings of Non-Compliance	Corrective Action Plan	Verification of Attainment *
1107.06, 1107.08 and 1125.04- Copies of 3 year evaluations, observations and consent forms.	These documents are to be provided by the sending LEA; LSA must request copies if they are missing. To correct this, we will develop and utilize a checklist to assure that necessary documents are either in the file or requested from the sending LEA.	
34CFR300.307- Participation in physical education.	There was no statement in the IEP's that students are receiving P/E. A page has been added to all students IEP's indicating the type and frequency of all specials (including P/E) received.	
1133.06 (d) - Progress reports sent to sending district.	A date stamp will be used to indicate that the report was sent to the sending district.	
1109.03 (a&d) - Was IEP development team appropriate?	At times, staff have recorded their task with a student (phonology tutor) rather than their certification. Staff will sign using their role in the team and their area of certification in the future.	
1123.14 - Record of disclosure.	Record of disclosure is only kept in the file if disclosure is made. Very few requests are made except for parents, sending LEA's and staff where disclosure is not required (1123.14 (b)).	
1113.01 - Vocational evaluations 1109.01 (e) - Vocational Component in the IEP.	If vocational programing has been considered, LSA has worked to schedule voc. evals.. If voc. programing is not being considered, no eval. should be present. Going forward, we are adding a vocational component to our enitire 9th and 10th grade program.	
1109.01 (g) and (l) - Transitions and duration of services.	A page has been added all IEP's dealing with these issues.	

\* - A = Attained, PA = Partially Attained, NA = Not Attained

# **IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

## **I. Develop or Improve Transition Processes – Students & Staff**

### **A. New students into LSA**

1. Utilize “MAP’s” process to gather student information.
  - a) Develop “MAPS type” process for gathering new student information – During 1998 - 1999
  - b) Begin training and meetings with parents - 9/98
  - c) Fully implement – 9/99
2. Investigate best practices at other schools.
  - a) Meeting 1-on-1 with Special Ed. Administrators – Ongoing
  - b) Join NH Assn. Of Special Ed. Administrators – 9/98
  - c) Maintain membership in Dyslexia Society – Ongoing
  - d) Staff participation in school on-sites – Ongoing

### **B. Students within LSA**

1. Continue utilizing summer school to acclimate student to new groupings where appropriate.
2. Development and implement alternative transition for all students – 9/99

### **C. Students leaving LSA**

1. Utilize vocational assessment and programming to better prepare students.
  - a) Staff part-time position to begin implementing career/vocational development program – 9/98
  - b) Fully implement – 9/99
2. Survey receiving schools to access expectations – During 1999 – 2000
3. Develop receiving plan with public school districts – During 2000 - 2001

### **D. New staff into LSA**

1. Schedule workshops at the beginning of the year to acclimate new staff - Ongoing

## **II. Understand the profile of the students we can best serve**

### **A. Fully develop the profile of the “typical” student who we have been successful with.**

- 1. Define “success” – Spring 1999**
- 2. Utilize case studies to develop profile of a “typical successful student” - 5/00**

### **B. Communicate that profile to appropriate constituents – 5/00**

## **III. Heighten awareness of Learning Differences**

### **A. Finish LD awareness program – 5/99**

### **B. Conduct teacher training, parent workshops and public school workshops (included in sending district tuition). Pilot program beginning 9/98; final program 9/99.**

## **IV. Increase perceived value of LSA’s program**

### **A. Develop pilot off-site teacher workshops for sending districts – 1998 - 1999**

### **B. Develop policy/pricing for workshops – 1/99**

### **C. Develop full program of workshops – 9/99**

### **D. Improve communication of existing workshops at LSA - Ongoing**

### **E. Continue and improve public relations visits to referral sources and to public school special education departments - Ongoing**

### **F. Formalize public relations team - 6/98**

- G. Increase staff involvement in professional organizations and workshops - Ongoing**

## **V. Improve relationships with parents**

- A. Use MAPS type process to interview new parents and involve them in their child's education** (see section I.A.1.)
- B. Increase parental involvement in school teams where possible - Ongoing**
- C. Find ways for parents to contribute from their home.**
  - 1. Utilizing technology – 9/99
  - 2. Possible video taping (cable in the classroom), telephoning, etc. - Ongoing
- D. Redesign cooperative council – Fall 1998**
- E. Add flexibility to the parent information meetings (ie various night and times) --Fall 1998**

## **VI. Increase access to the school for the community at large**

- A. Make our building available**
  - 1. Develop plan including policies and pricing – fall 1998
  - 2. Communicate to public – beginning 1/99
- B. Make our playground available - ongoing**
- C. Make our educational resources available**
  - 1. Develop listing of available resources and policy for sharing them – fall 1999
  - 2. Communicate to public – beginning 1/00

- D. Open workshops/parent information nights to the public and publicize the schedule – 1998-1999**

**VII. Cooperation with the state Department of Education**

- A. Continue sending staff to participate in other school's compliance reviews - Ongoing**
- B. Participate in Department of Education forums – Beginning fall 1998**
- C. Stay current with changing laws – Ongoing**
- D. Initiate resurrection of New Hampshire Private School Association – Beginning 9/98**